

REMARKS TO THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE  
2005 BIENNIAL POLICY AND ADVOCACY CONFERENCE  
SHAPING THE GLOBAL FUTURE:  
AMERICA'S NATIONAL INTERESTS IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY  
MARCH 2, 2005

Thank you, Dov. It is good to be here with all of you.

Let me begin by saying that we can all agree that Israel remaining a safe, vibrant democracy is in the U.S. national interest. The future of a Jewish state, and a strong, stable democracy in the Middle East, is important to us all.

As always, Israel is surrounded by threats to her existence. As I said to Dr. Condoleezza Rice when she recently testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "I deplore any rhetoric of hate, particularly against the state of Israel." I wholeheartedly support Israel's efforts to protect and defend herself.

Your conference is being held at an opportune time. We have seen successful elections in Iraq – more successful than many of us could have hoped for. The Palestinians have held successful elections. Egypt appears to be making strides toward holding elections. There is talk of reform in Saudi Arabia. In the wake of the tragic assassination of Rafik Hariri, regional and international pressure seems to be working toward the end of having Syria withdraw from Lebanon.

Discussing these events in the broader context of the U.S. and its role – both as an advocate for peace, and in protecting our citizens – is important. I commend you for calling this conference to further this exploration.

Progress between the Israelis and Palestinians is also vital to the U.S. national interest. When I was in Iraq, much of the graffiti spoke to the plight of the Palestinian people. Secretary Wolfowitz has testified that a free Iraq holds the seeds for a secure Israel and a way to safely establish a Palestinian state. In a speech before the war to the American Enterprise Institute, President Bush said, "success in Iraq could also begin a new stage for Middle Eastern peace, and set in motion progress towards a truly democratic Palestinian state." I truly believe that focusing on solving the crisis between the Israelis and the Palestinians will have a positive effect on the struggle in Iraq.

Recent events in the region provide hope that peace can actually be achieved. Who would have thought two years ago that we would be watching Ariel Sharon implement a plan to dismantle some settlements? Or that the Palestinians would have a leader who might be willing to implement necessary security and internal government changes?

Though peace may be closer, there are forces of change surrounding Israel that we should monitor closely. The Road Map calls for the Quartet to oversee the path to peace.

The Quartet members themselves -- the United States, the E.U., the U.N. and Russia -- all have important roles.

I am increasingly concerned about Russia's role in the Middle East.

There is no question geography makes Russia a key player. The Caspian Sea region has always been a rich supply of water, oil, and energy resources. Neighboring those rich resources are countries with struggling economies. Therefore, it makes sense for Russia to be a player; however, its proposed weapons sales and investments in the nuclear energy sector in Syria and Iran are perplexing.

When President Bush met with President Putin a few days ago, they announced an agreement between the two nations to fight the war on terror and to combat the illegal trade of man-portable surface-to-air missiles. They also agreed that Iran should not have a nuclear weapon. And, that we should work together closely to find peace in the Middle East. These are all very positive steps.

This begs the question -- why does Russia appear to moving forward with its plans with Syria and Iran? Some people believe these actions simply are a matter of economics for Russia. Others argue that Russia is trying to again assert power in the region, in opposition to the U.S. I think both of these factors are important. However, I don't think we should discount the difficulty that Russia is experiencing dealing with the fact that its global status has changed.

We need to better understand and attend to this dynamic. It seems to me that something is getting lost, because we have a good relationship yet we are finding ourselves on opposite ends of some important issues. Could our way of dealing with Russia be part of the problem, rather than just the issues themselves?

In the nuclear age, U.S. foreign policy is at its best when we seek balance and find common ground, even with countries we strongly disagree with. One choice is to isolate countries we have problems with, which may lead them to coalesce against us. Or we can be engaged, build goodwill and work for positive change. Economically, militarily and politically it is too costly not to be engaged.

Thank you.